

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH REHABILITATION SERVICES**



**Testimony of
Vincent Schiraldi
Director
Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services**

**Committee on Human Services
April 10, 2008**

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services' proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2009.

The Mission of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services is to improve public safety by building on the strengths of the young people in our care in the least restrictive environment consistent with public safety. Our vision has consistently been to achieve this goal by creating decent and rehabilitative secure care *and* to develop a continuum of community based care for the youth under our supervision that is second to none in the nation. Fiscal Year 2009 will be perhaps the most exciting year in this Department's young life because it is the year in which several major initiatives to improve both secure care *and* our continuum of care will come to fruition.

- The proposed FY09 budget for the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services is \$82,243,068. This represents an increase of \$1,951,382 or 2.4% increase over the approved FY08 budget of \$80,291,686.

DYRS will continue to build the continuum of care in FY09 that supports the goal of rehabilitating youth in the least restrictive, most homelike environment and will allow the agency to move closer to the goal of exiting the Jerry M consent decree.

MAJOR INITIATIVES

Transition to a new secure facility in Laurel:

In addition to the ongoing reform efforts I described during our recent Performance Oversight Hearing in February, I would like to talk today about three major initiatives over the next year that we believe will dramatically impact our ability to move the reform efforts and transform the way we provide services, supports and opportunities to our youth and their families.

As you know, we are in the construction stage of the replacement facility for the outdated and dilapidated Oak Hill Youth Center. We are currently on-schedule to complete construction and

be able to move into the new facility in early to mid '09. Though the design effort involved a tremendous amount of time and effort, we were fortunate to have the assistance of the leading architect in the country on juvenile facilities, and we believe that the new facility will be a model for other jurisdictions to emulate architecturally. Key elements will include:

- Normalized living units that house no more 10 youth in each unit.
- Individual rooms for each youth.
- Unit furnishings that create a warm-homelike environment; carpeting, upholstered furniture, wooden bedroom furniture, and greater privacy in bathrooms.
- Group cohesion fostered by the design.
- A state of the art space that will be an ideal environment to run a robust range of workforce development, educational, recreational, and culturally enriching opportunities for residents.

Transitioning into the new facility will also create significant operational challenges. In addition to needing to train staff on the new technology and new space in order to effectively and efficiently operate the new physical plant, “moving” into the new facility will be done in phases as recommended by best practices in the field. Thus, instead of closing the old facility on one day and moving all youth and staff into the new building at one time, we will first train and orient staff to the new building, and then move youth in unit-by-unit and allow for a period of time to have the facility operating at less than capacity in order to work out kinks that will inevitably occur. This type of transition is critical to ensuring that a healthy culture be established in the new facility from day one. The challenge of course is that this will also require us to essentially operate two facilities at one time on the Laurel campus, for a period of approximately 3 to 6 months.

Finally, due to an increase in the number of youth committed to the Department we are also in the process of developing community based programs for youth awaiting placement in non-secure programs. This will allow us to better manage our resources and population in the new facility and minimize the chances of having a large “awaiting placement” population.

Creation of “Service Coalitions” to transform the delivery of community based services:

DYRS believes that it can achieve better outcomes for youth and their families when they are primarily served in the communities in which they live by providers and individuals vested in those same communities. To achieve better outcomes for youth, in FY 2009, DYRS will initiate, or will be in the early stages of, the implementation of three regionally based Service Coalitions led by “Lead Entities.” The creation of Services Coalitions for DYRS committed youth and their families will result in a well assimilated network of supportive relationships, effective program options that emphasize individual strengths and goals, personal accountability, youth development, community development, family involvement and public safety. The Service Coalitions are designed to engage the community through partnerships with an array of neighborhood/community based youth and family serving organizations, programs and individuals who have strong ties to the community who will function as an effective social “safety net” of caring for DYRS youth and their families.

The regionalized Service Coalition Concept was developed through a DYRS/Community partnership that occurred over numerous meetings involving substantial community input. Since then, DYRS has presented a more fleshed out concept to the vendor community and other key stakeholders at lengthy meetings that generated discussion and verbal feedback, followed by written questions and feedback. We are now in the final stages of writing the NOFA, with our sister agency the Department of Mental Health, which we hope to issue this spring. In addition to funding service provision in a new manner, DYRS is also working collaboratively with the Children's Youth Investment Trust which will be providing substantial training to the Service Coalitions once they are funded and established.

Ideally, and if implemented well, we believe these Service Coalitions will achieve multiple goals, including fostering "Community Development" in addition to "Youth Development", as well as creating the opportunity for smaller community-based grass roots organizations to work with our youth and families in addition to the larger more well-established organizations that have been providing services for years.

Creation of new "Family Reunification Homes":

DYRS will be contracting for new "Family Reunification Homes," (FRHs) with the goal of rapidly reunifying youth and families through collaborative work between DYRS, CSS and CFSA in what used to be underperforming youth shelters. The FRHs will target predisposition youth, ordered by the Family Court, who would otherwise be detained in secure detention. Primarily this would include medium to high risk nonviolent youth, youth whose social factors may make their home temporarily untenable for his/her return; or, youth for whom no parent, immediate family member or extended family member has been identified or is available. Placement in the homes is time-limited and in ideal circumstances will not last more than forty-five (45) days; however, placement will continue as long as ordered by the Family Court.

Unlike the current youth shelters, the capacity in the Family Reunification Homes will be limited to not more than 4 youth per home and will focus on connecting youth with their families, education, workforce opportunities and/or other appropriate placements.

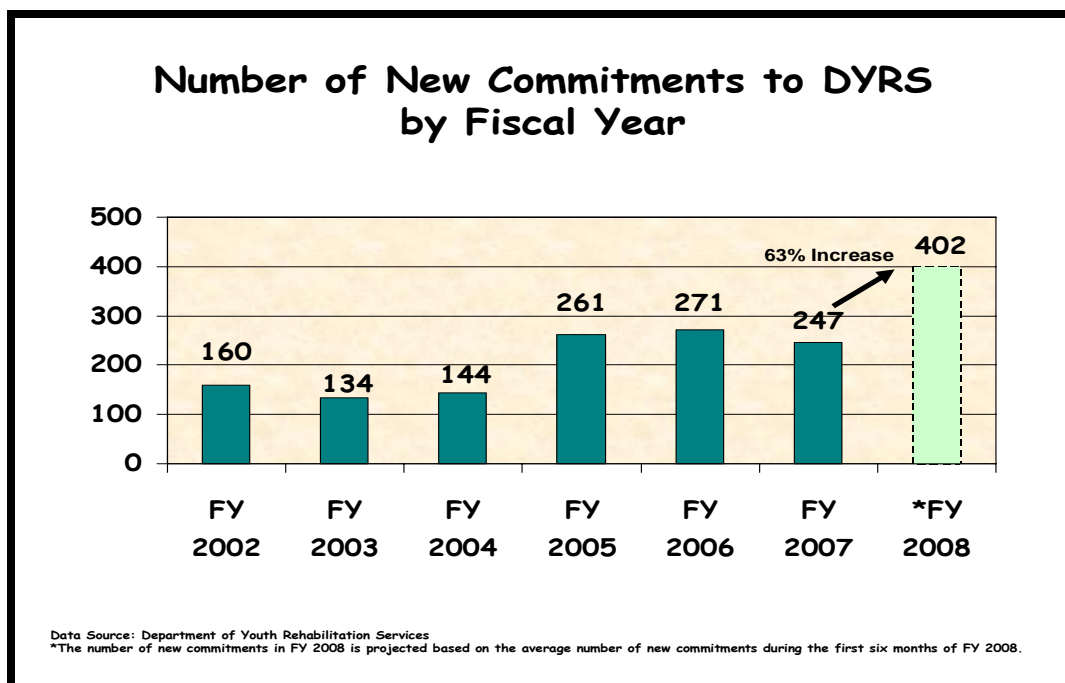
Reform of services to our shelter home population was a major priority of Family Court Presiding Judge Anita Josey-Herring and the model that we will be initiating came out of meetings and deliberations under the aegis of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiatives' Alternatives to Detention Committee. The Committee included representation from Court Social Services, the Office of the Attorney General, the Public Defender Services, Child and Family Services and ParentWatch, in addition to DYRS, and Judge Josey-Herring herself has subsequently commented on a draft of the RFP. I say all of this to say that this is the kind of example of how collaboration fostered by JDAI can help develop a program that has buy-in from key members in the government and community.

DYRS, in consultation with OCP, anticipates the RFP will be issued in early April, with the goal of identifying and securing provider service provision by June 30, 2008.

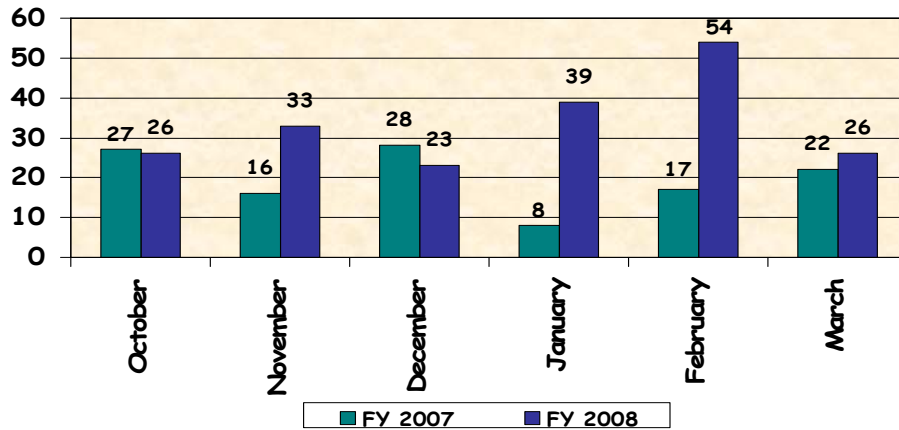
MAJOR POTENTIAL CHALLENGE

Possibly our most significant challenge moving forward are unexpected population surges over the past year at both the Oak Hill Youth Center (committed youth) and the Youth Services Center (pre-trial detained youth).

We have experienced a dramatic increase in the number of youth committed to our care. For example, based on commitments ending March 31, we are anticipating a 63% increase in commitments, which is a significant increase. In March, we received 26 new commitments, still higher than average but a much reduced increase vs. January and February (by comparison, we averaged 21 commitments a month last year and 46 per month in January and February of 2008). While we are working diligently with the Superior Court and OAG on this issue, the increase in commitments in January and February may be an artifact of a large number of cases being processed quickly due to the new Speedy Trial Act requirements, which may work itself out in coming months.



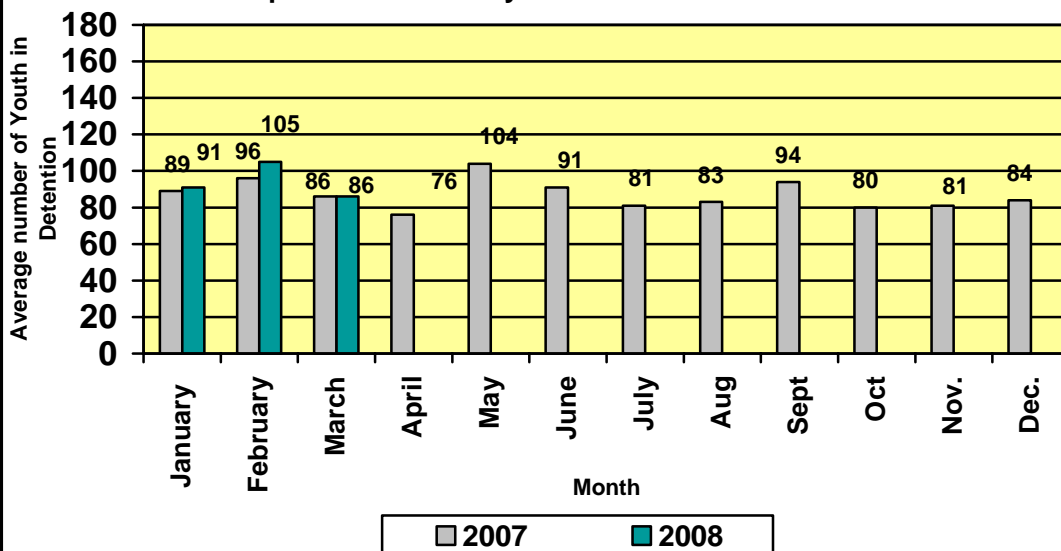
Comparison of Number of New Commitments to DYRS by Fiscal Year and Month

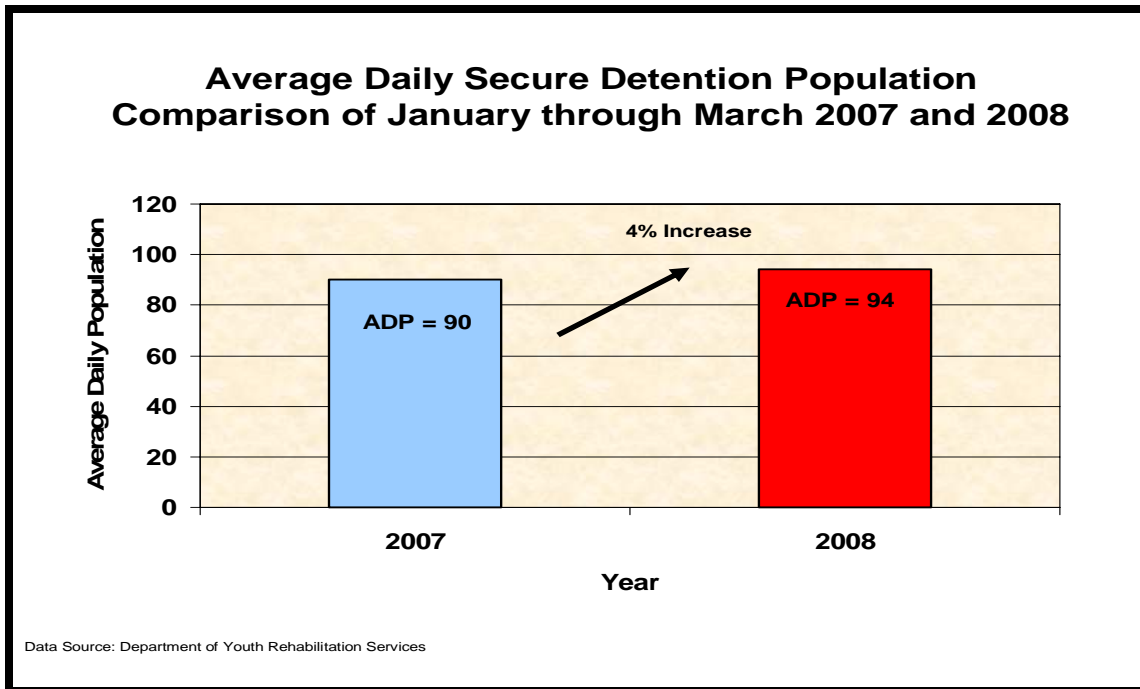


Data Source: Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services

Though the increases are not as dramatic for detained youth, we have also seen spikes in the population. Overall, the Average Daily Population of the Youth Services Center (YSC) from January thru March 2008 (not including overnights) was 90, while the overall ADP for January through March 2008 was 94, an increase of four percent.

Average Secure Detention Population Comparison of January - December for 2007 and 2008





Further, it doesn't appear as though these increases are based on crime rates. While the first four months of FY '08 witnessed a 10% increase in overall juvenile arrests vs. FY2007, there also was a 4% *decline* in serious (Part 1) arrests during that time frame. Part 1 arrests are, generally, the kinds of youth who end up in secure confinement.

We are working closely with the Courts, CSS, OAG, PDS, and CFSA to attempt to develop and/or implement strategies to address these issues. It bears noting that, since the passage of the Speedy Trial Act that Chairman Wells co-authored, there has been virtually no list for youth waiting to get into shelters and lengths of stay in shelters have dropped to a much more reasonable level. It is safe to say that, had it not been for that act, crowding at the YSC would be much worse than it is today.

CONCLUSION

FY 08 has been an exciting year, at the end of this fiscal year, the vast majority of youth committed to our custody will be having their case plans created through a Youth Family Team Meeting Process, we will be almost done with construction on our new facility and our Service Coalitions and Family Reunification Homes will have begun serving youth or will be poised to do so. FY 09 will be a time of implementation of some of this agency's most important advances and continue the major reform effort initiated three years ago. As you well know, however, change is hard and I'm sure there will be bumps in the road and some resistance to the changes. I absolutely believe, however, that these initiatives and our related reform efforts will take us several more important steps in the direction of becoming a juvenile justice agency of which District residents can be proud. I'm pleased to submit the FY 09 budget and look forward to answering whatever questions the Committee may have.